

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
IO-13 ACDA-07 MC-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0638

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 07679

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, PINS, CG, AO, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH REPLY TO ZAIRIAN ASSISTANCE REQUEST

REF: PARIS 7423

1. AS OF NOON MARCH 16, GISCARD HAS NOT YET ACTED ON THE QUAI RECOMMENDATION THAT THE FRENCH SHIP 22 OR 23 TONS OF SMALL ARMS AND MUNITIONS TO ZAIRE, ACCORDING TO QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA DE LA ROCHERE. HE "HOPED" THE DECISION WOULD BE MADE TODAY AND SAID THAT MATERIAL IS ALREADY LOADED ABOARD AN AIR ZAIRE PLANE WHICH ONLY AWAITS THE PRESIDENTIAL GREEN LIGHT TO TAKE OFF. DE LA ROCHERE NOTED THAT THE QUESTION OF PROVIDING FIVE PUMA HELICOPTERS WAS "QUITE ANOTHER THING", AND INTIMATED THAT THE REPLY TO THAT REQUEST MIGHT BE LONG DELAYED. HE PROMISED AGAIN TO INFORM US AS SOON AS GISCARD DECIDES.

2. DE LA ROCHERE INDICATED THAT THE PRESS IS AWARE OF MOBUTU'S REQUEST TO THE FRENCH BUT THAT FOR THE MOMENT, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE QUAI INTENDS NEITHER TO CONFIRM OR DENY IT. SINCE IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO HIDE THE FACT ONCE THE FIRST SHIPMENT HAS LANDED IN ZAIRE, HE THOUGHT IT WOULD EVENTUALLY BE NECESSARY TO ACKNOWLEDGE IT.

3. DISCUSSING THE GENERAL SITUATION, DE LA ROCHERE SAID THAT THE FRENCH ARE STRUCK BY THE FACTS THAT:

MOBUTU'S TROOPS HAVE RETAKEN ALMOST NOTHING; THE KATANGESE HAVE NOT FOUGHT THEIR "BROTHERS" BUT HAVE BEEN WELL-RECEIVED BY THE LOCAL POPULATION; AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT CUBANS OR SOVIETS HAVE ENTERED ZAIRE, ALTHOUGH THEY PROBABLY ARE HELPING DIRECT THE OPERATION FROM WITHIN ANGOLA. THE QUAI ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IS FAR FROM SOLID, HE CONTINUED, BUT THERE ARE CURRENTLY TWO VERY TENTATIVE HYPOTHESES. THE "MINIMAL" HYPOTHESIS ASCRIBES THE OPERATION TO AN EFFORT TO SCARE MOBUTU INTO WITHDRAWING SUPPORT FOR GROUPS RESISTING THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT -- THE FNLA AND FLEC. THE OTHER HYPOTHESIS HOLDS THAT AT A MOMENT WHEN SHABA IS WEAK AND KATANGESE GENDARMES ARE AVAILABLE, AN EFFORT IS BEING MADE TO DECLARE A KATANGAN REPUBLIC. PERHAPS THE EFFORT IS OF SOVIET-CUBAN INSPIRATION, BUT THE HOPE IS THAT THE LACK OF RESISTANCE IN SHABA WOULD MAKE IT APPEAR TO BE A PURELY AFRICAN AFFAIR. DE LA ROCHERE DID NOT EXCLUDE THAT THE INVASION MIGHT BE AN ATTEMPT TO TOPPLE MOBUTU. IN A "PERSONAL" VEIN, HE WONDERED IF IT MIGHT ALSO BE A SOVIET TEST OF ZAIRE'S ALLIES, NOTBELGIUM OR FRANCE, BUT THE NEW CARTER ADMINISTRATION.

4. COMMENT: DE LA ROCHERE CLEARLY TOOK SATISFACTION FROM THE FACT THAT ALL PARTIES CONTINUE TO DECLARE THAT THE OPERATION IS AN INTERNAL MATTER, NOTING THAT A POSITIVE FRENCH RESPONSE TO MOBUTU WOULD NOT, THEREFORE, DISTURB FRANCO-ANGOLAN RELATIONS. THE QUAI WISH TO REPLY AFFIRMATIVELY TO MOBUTU IS BASED PARTLY ON CONFIDENTIAL

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RECOGNITION THAT NOT TO DO SO, WOULD UPSET MODERATE FRIENDS LIKE HOUPHOUET AND SENGHOR, BUT IT IS NATURALLY WARY ABOUT NEGATIVE EFFECTS ELSEWHERE, BOTH AMONG AFRICAN PROGRESSIVES AND ON FRENCH RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS. GISCARD MAY BE WEIGHING SUCH CONSIDERATIONS, AS WELL AS THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF ANY FRENCH SUPPORT TO MOBUTU ON NEXT SUNDAY'S MUNICIPAL AND NEXT YEAR'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. GAMMON

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